

The Westons of Powder Point, Duxbury, Mass.

The Duxbury Tercentenary Committee had no difficulty in selecting the site of the activities of the Weston family as suitable for a marker. For the Weston family from 1764 when Ezra Weston I started building and outfitting ships until the decline of the ship building industry about 1850 was composed of men who made names for themselves.

As so frequently happens in the history of family merchantile houses, all went well under the direction of the first two Ezras, alone or in partnership, but not at all well under the guidance of the sons and grandsons of these two until the last of the four firms of Westons ceased for good in 1857.

Most of the family were born, lived and died on the hundred acre estate on Powder Point which had its beginning when Eliphas, father of the first Ezra, married Pricilla^s₁, daughter of John Peterson, who inherited large holdings on the Point.

Ezra Weston I started business in a small way at the site which was afterwards to become famous in the annals of shipbuilding and maritime affairs not only in Duxbury but in the whole country.

This Ezra, who began business under the firm name of Ezra Weston at the age of twenty-one, was most enterprising and became one of the wealthiest men in the province. He was the largest shipbuilder and owner in the country and both before and after he took into partnership his son, Ezra II in the year 1798, the name of Weston was known all over the world, wherever there was shipping.

The two Ezra Westons had their numerous vessels built at two shipyards. The earlier one was at the yard of Benjamin Prior, at Harden Hill which is located in the southeast part of the town shore where Samuel Hall built for them several ships. The second shipyard was established about 1834 on the southerly side of Bluefish River where Hall built for Ezra

Weston II a large number of vessels, among them the "Hope", launched in 1841, and in 1850 commanded by Captain John Bradford of Powder Point who, in collaboration with his daughter, Mrs. Ellen Bradford Stebbins, published in the Old Colony Memorial in June 1895, an outstanding article on Duxbury shipbuilding, which has been extensively quoted ever since. In 1850 the "Hope", 881 tons, was the largest merchant ship in New England. It is planned to have the picture of this ship made into a seal for the use of letters during the Duxbury Tercentenary of 1937.

Captain Bradford's description of the Boston industries can not be improved upon and is here quoted. "This particular ropewalk was part of a system of industries carried on by the Westons, without a somewhat extended notice of which no account of Duxbury shipbuilding could be regarded as adequate. Ezra Weston, the second of the name and inheriting from his father the popular title of "King Caesar" was for the years 1820 to 1842 probably the most widely known citizen of Duxbury and was considered the largest ship owner in the United States; Daniel Webster so rated him in his great speech at Saratoga during the Harrison campaign of 1840. His ships were then to be seen in all parts of the world; he not only built his own vessels, but he controlled nearly all the branches of business connected with shipbuilding and the ownership of vessels; he had his own ropewalk, spar yard, blacksmith shop and sail loft; brought his timber and lumber from Haverhill and Bangor in his own schooners or from Bridgewater and Middleborough with his own oxen or horse teams, and his supplies from Boston in his own packets; his salt came from Cadiz, St. Ubes and Turk's Island in his own brigs; he sent his schooners to the Grand Banks for fish in the summer time and "out south" in the winter for corn. He owned a large tract of land on Powder Point and here on the south side, where Bluefish River widens into the bay, with the outlook towards Captain's Hill and Plymouth stood his dwelling house; here still remains 'Weston's wharf' where his new vessels fitted out and where his packets loaded and

unloaded, but spar yard and sail loft, blacksmith shop and ropewalk have all disappeared.

"There were four Weston firms as follows:

E. Weston, 1764-1798, 34 years; Ezra I

E. W/Eston and Son, 1798-1822, 24 years; Ezra I and Ezra II

Ezra Weston, 1822-1842, 20 years; Ezra II

E. Weston and Sons, 1842-1857, 15 years; Ezra II

Several months in 1842; Gershom, Alden and Ezra IV, 1842-1852, 10 years

Gershom and Alden, 1852-1857, 5 years.

The four Weston firms owned and built from 1800 to 1846 inclusive 97 vessels; namely, 21 ships ranging from 246 to 881 tons, 1 bark 209 tons, 30 brigs from 120 to 240 tons, 35 schooners ranging from 20 to 120 tons and 10 sloops ranging from 50 to 63 tons. The total tonnage of the 97 vessels was about 16,700 tons and based on general marine construction prices of the "olden time" it may be roughly estimated that the cost of building the 97 vessels was about \$1,421,000". (In Memoriam, G. B. Weston, Deborah B. Weston, by E. B. Weston. Privately printed, 1916)

Undoubtedly the fame of the Weston family rests upon the genius and abilities of the first two Ezras. Not that the others of the name were not able but the decline of the business may be ascribed to changes in shipbuilding with which Duxbury could not cope. The wonder is, not that the business declined as clipper ships began to be built elsewhere but that ships of the tonnage enumerated above could have been built at all on narrow and shallow rivers leading into a tide harbor with shallow, twisting channels. And the smaller vessels were even launched across highways. It was useless to fight against the changed conditions. Gradually the machine age was approaching and older methods had to be discarded.

The age of the Westons produced a certain type of men and women whom it is a privilege to honor; but they will be replaced by equally good although entirely different types of individuals.

We should rejoice that New England has such a heritage and not be discouraged as to what the future has in store for those who are to follow.

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